

# Online goal-setting raises university grades

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Online goal-setting helps struggling university students raise their grades and stay in school, according to new psychology research from the University of Toronto and St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center.

"Twenty-five per cent of university [students](#) who enrol in four-year university programs never graduate," says study lead Dominique Morisano. "This is unacceptable, given the expense and importance of a university education."

Jordan Peterson and Jacob Hirsh of the Department of Psychology at the University of Toronto and Morisano of The Child & Family Institute of St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center in New York City developed an online goal-setting program that helps individuals imagine their desired future three to five years down the road and to plan for that future. Students who completed the goal-setting or "future authoring" program raised their grade point averages by 30 per cent, and were much less likely to drop courses or quit university altogether.

Study authors note that many factors other than sheer ability hinder academic performance.

"Students who lack clarity about their long-term goals tend to be much less motivated," says Peterson. "Clearly defined and articulated goals give people purpose and meaning, and protect them from anxiety and despair."

Morisano says the researchers, "wanted to develop a program that was straightforward, inexpensive, and broadly available."

Peterson notes that students spend a lot of time absorbing facts, but very little time thinking in a detailed, structured manner about the nature and purpose of their individual lives.

"In consequence, for several years, I have asked students in my classes to write about their personal past, present and future," he says. "They find this process engaging, beneficial, and motivating. Many studies have indicated that writing about important events makes people more productive, happier, less anxious, and, as Dr. James Pennebaker has demonstrated at the University of Texas, physically healthier. We believe that everyone could benefit from such personal writing."

The online programs can be publicly accessed at [www.selfauthoring.com](http://www.selfauthoring.com). The study findings, funded by UofT's Desautels Centre for Integrative Thinking, were published in the latest edition of the *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

Provided by University of Toronto

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